Understanding the Month of Glory Lessons on the Month of Ramadhan

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An Invitation

This is an announcement from
the Emperor of Emperors
the King of Kings
and the One who is in Supreme
control of the Universe

All believers are invited to be the guests of Allah
during the holy month of Ramadhan

Allah invites them to a Divine feast
and gives them gald tidings of blessings and forgiveness

This invitation is to tell you how much the Lord loves you
and wants you to be close to him

He has invited you to remember Him so He may remember
you
to ask from Him so He may grant you
He wants you to rid yourself of the burden of sins
so that you may be lighter when you return to Him

He has prepared for you special gifts and rewards
and stored for you precious robes
He has asked you to seek Him
so you can be from among His friends

Such a royal invitation must be accepted
with a lot of enthusiasm and excitement
Preparations must be made to attend
the royal feast in an appropriate manner
Please make haste as the opportunity for accepting
the invitation will soon be over.

Verses of the Holy Qur'an on Ramadhan

O You who believe!
Fasting is prescribed for you,
as it was prescribed for those before you,
so that you may guard against evil.
(2:183)

The month of Ramadhan
that in which the Qur'an was revealed
a guidance to men
and clear proofs of the guidance and distinction
therefore, whoever of you is present in the month,
he shall fast therein
and whoever is sick or upon a journey
then he shall fast a like number of days.
Allah desires ease for you
and He does not desire for you difficulty
and He desires that you should complete the number
and that you should exalt the greatness of Allah
for His having guided you
and that you may give thanks.
(2:185)

Ahadith on Fasting

One who while fasting does not guard his tongue from telling lies and does not refrain from bad deeds, is not respecting his fast. Allah does not approve of mere abstention from food.
Holy Prophet (s)

When you are fasting, you should not speak ill of anybody, nor should you be rough and noisy. If anybody speaks ill of you or tries to pick a quarrel with you, reply him not, but say to him that you are fasting.
Holy Prophet (s)

A person gets the same reward by reciting in this month, one verse of the Holy Qur'an, as others do by reciting the whole of the Qur'an in other months.
Holy Prophet (s)

The day of your fast should not be like any ordinary day. When you fast, all your senses - eyes, ears, tongue, hands and feet must fast with you.
Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (a)

O Jabir! Whoever during the month of Ramadhan, fasts in its days, stands up for prayers in parts of the night, controls his desires and emotions, puts a rein on his tongue, keeps his eyes down, and does not injure the feelings of others, will become as free of sins as the day he was born.
Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a)

The sleep of a fasting person is worship, his silence is glorification (of Allah), his prayers are answered and his actions are multiplied.

Imam Ali (a)

The prayer of a fasting person at the time of Iftar is never rejected
Imam Ali (a)

Whoever is prevented from food that he likes, because of his fast, Allah will feed him from the food of Heaven and from its drink.
Holy Prophet (s)

There are two pleasures for a fasting person; one when he breaks his fast, and one when he meets his Lord.
Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (a)

Unfortunate is the person who is deprived of the forgiveness of Allah during this great month (of Ramadhan)
Holy Prophet (s)

Fasting is a protection from the fire.
Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (a)

Fast, and you shall be healthy.
Holy Prophet (s)

If people understood what good there was in the month of Ramadhan, they would have liked that it last for a year.
Holy Prophet (s)

Whoever is not forgiven in the month of Ramadhan, then in which month will he be forgiven?
Holy Prophet (s)

A Message from the Holy Prophet (s)

O People! The month of Allah has come with His mercies and blessings. This is the month that is the best of all months in the eyes of Allah. Its days are the best of days, its nights are the best of nights, its hours are the best of hours. This is a month in which you have been invited by Him. You have been given the opportunity in this month to receive the honors from Allah, the Merciful.

In this month if you fast as ordained by Allah, every breath you take has the reward of Tasbeeh, and your sleep has the reward of worship. Your good deeds are rewarded more than usual, and your duas are accepted

Therefore you must invoke your Lord in earnest, with hearts that are free from sin and evil, and pray that Allah may help you keep the fasts, and to recite the Holy Qur'an. Surely the person who in this month does not receive the mercy and benevolence of Allah is most unfortunate.

O people! You have made your conscience the slave of your desires. Make it free by invoking Him for forgiveness. Your back is breaking under the heavy load of your sins, so prostrate yourself before Him for long intervals and make it lighter.

Anybody who does not annoy others in this month, Allah will keep him safe from His anger on the day of Judgement. . . Anybody who treats well his relatives in this month, Allah will bestow His mercy on him on the day of Judgement.

Whoever offers sunnat prayers in this month, Allah will save him from Hell. Whoever, in this month, offers one wajib prayer, the angels will write the rewards of seventy such prayers that were offered by him in other months. Whoever recites salawat often, Allah will keep the scales of his good deeds heavy . .. whoever recites in this month, only one ayat of the Holy Qur'an, he will be rewarded in a manner as if he had recited the entire Qur'an in other months.

Imam Sajjad (a) Welcomes the Month of Ramadhan

Praise be to Allah, who ordained this month, the month of Ramadhan, the month of fasting, the month of Islam, the month of purity, the month of purification, and the month of prayers. In this month the Qur'an was made to descend as a guidance to mankind and contains clear instructions and distinctions. He gave this month superiority over all other months by giving it abundant honor and dignity. He prohibited in it what He has allowed in other months in order to exalt it, and forbade in it food and drink in order to honor it.

O Lord! Bless Muhammad and his family, and inspire us to know this month's excellence, and to honor its dignity, and to abstain from whatever You have forbidden in it. Help us to observe its fast, by restraining our limbs from disobeying You, and by employing them in that which would please You, so that we may not lend our ears to any vain speech, and may not direct our eyes, hands and feet towards anything forbidden, and that nothings fills our stomachs except what You have made lawful, and our tongues may not utter anything except what You have allowed.

O Lord! Bless Muhammad and his family, and give us grace to perform timely the five prayers with due regard to their limits which You have enjoined, and the rites which You have prescribed. In this respect, raise us to the rank of those who performed them with success, who duly observed their essential points, who always performed them at proper times, in most perfect and complete humility according to the rules laid down by Your Prophet, may You blessings be on him and his family.

And our Lord, give us grace in this month, to show favors to our relations, and do good to them, and to take care of our neighbors and do good to them, to take care of our neighbors with kindness and benevolence, to purge our property of obligations, and purify it by giving charity, and to call back those who have left us, and be just to those who were unjust to us, and make pace with those who were hostile to us.

O Lord! Erase our sins with the disappearance of this month's crescent, and free us from our penalties with the completion of its days, so that the month may pass from us while You have cleansed us of our guilts, and freed us from our sins. O Lord! Fill this month with our worship of you alone, and adorn its moments with our service to You, and help us in the daytime to observe the fast, and at night to pray and beseech You, help us to humble ourselves before

you and lower ourselves in Your presence.

A Chant to welcome the Holy Month

Ahlan Ahlan Ya Ramadhan
Shahrul Khayri wal Ihsaan
Qulu Ahlan Ya Atfaal
Ahlan Ahlan Ya Ramadhan

Shahrul Khairi yunaadika
Hayya tahayya' ya Tifli
La Tukhdhib la tu'dhi abadan
Kay la tughdhibur Rahman

Ahlan Ahlan Ya Ramadhan
Shahrul Khayri wal Ihsaan
Qulu Ahlan Ya Atfaal
Ahlan Ahlan Ya Ramadhan

Shahrul Khaiari yunadeeka
Qum fatawadhdha' ya tifli
Salli wadhwir Rahman
Kay tadkhul alal Jinan

Ahlan Ahlan Ya Ramadhan
Shahrul Khayri wal Ihsaan
Qulu Ahlan Ya Atfaal
Ahlan Ahlan Ya Ramadhan

Shahrul wasli lil arham
Shahrul atfi alal Insaan
Az zakatu wal ataa'
Fiha Itqun minan naar

Ahlan Ahlan Ya Ramadhan
Shahrul Khayri wal Ihsaan
Qulu Ahlan Ya Atfaal
Ahlan Ahlan Ya Ramadhan

WelcomeWelcome O Ramadhan
The month of goodness and piety
Say welcome to it, O Children
Welcome Welcome, O Ramadhan

The good month is calling to you
Hurry and get ready O children
Do not lie, don't hurt anyone
So that you don't anger the Lord

Welcome Welcome O Ramadhan
The month of goodness and piety
Say welcome to it, O Children
Welcome Welcome, O Ramadhan

The good month is calling to you
Rise and do Wudhu O children
Pray and do Dua to the Lord
So that you may enter Heaven

Welcome Welcome O Ramadhan
The month of goodness and piety
Say welcome to it, O Children
Welcome Welcome, O Ramadhan

The month of getting close to relatives
The month of being kind to humans
Giving of Zakat and charity in it
Frees you from the fire

Welcome Welcome O Ramadhan
The month of goodness and piety
Say welcome to it, O Children
Welcome Welcome, O Ramadhan

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The Ramadhan Checklist

When starting on a journey, most people like to have a list of items that they will need. Before departure they make sure they have all the items. That is to ensure they do not spoil their trip by forgetting something, or not being well equipped for the trip. A journey is usually exciting, and travellers like to make the most of the opportunity to enjoy themselves.

Ramadhan is a spiritual journey for the believer. For the whole month, he travels to get nearer to Allah. On the way he will pass many obstacles and diversions which may hinder and slow his passage. To make sure that his journey is swift and progressive, he needs many items. Preparing for Ramdhan means to ensure one has the necessary equipment for the journey.

The following are some of the necessary items for a believer's trip towards Allah.

An Attitude of Anticipation and Enthusiasm

A believer looks forward to the month of Ramadhan. He enjoys the beauty of spirit that Ramadhan begins, the warmth of carrying out the orders of Allah, the hope of achieving His pleasure, and the happiness at being able to obey the commands of Allah. He is happy when the month arrives and sad when it departs.

Flexible Time and Schedule

Ramadhan requires that we set aside more time than normal for worship and prayers. A believer plans his time in such a way that in Ramadhan he is not overwhelmed by the demands of the world. He lessens work if possible and cuts down on activities which can be put to a halt for a little while. The chance to earn rewards and blessings from Allah in this special time will only last a limited time. Believers must make sure their daily schedules allow maximum benefit of this special time.

- A Qur'an with a good translation

An important part of worship in Ramadhan includes reciting the Qur'an regularly. A Hadith tells us, *Ramadhan is the Spring of the Qur'an*. Understanding the word of Allah, and pondering over it should be daily activities in this holy month. A believer makes sure he has a copy of the Qur'an which is easy to read, and which has a simple translation which he can understand. If time permits, he should also read the commentary of the Qur'an. It is also important to have the right books for the Duas and A`amaals for this month.

- A Donation to a Worthwhile Charity

Ramadhan is the best time to donate in the way of Allah. To feed the hungry or give to the needy is an act of great reward, especially during the holy month. Before the month of Ramadhan, a believer decides how much he can afford to give, chooses a worthwhile charity and sends his donation. This is a recommended charity, different from the zakatul Fitra which is obligatory for Eid. Hadith tells us that charity cools the anger of Allah and brings down many blessings on the giver. In the month of Ramadhan this rewards is multiplied many times.

- A Determination to Avoid Sins

Fastings is not mere abstinence from food and drink, as we have heard many times. It is also staying away from all sins. While fasting, all the organs of the body fast, and refrain from doing anything which would displease Allah. A believer makes a firm decision to avoid all sins that he commits most often, and plans how he will stay away from them during the month. This conscious preparation of a war against sins is a very necessary item in the baggage of a believer in his journey towards Allah.

A Desire to Help Others

In his sermon at the approach of the holy month of Ramadhan, the Prophet (s) said: *Whoever lightens the work of his workers in this month, Allah will make easy his accounting on the Day of Judgement*. This does not only apply to those who have workers working for them. To help and lessen the work of others: parents, siblings, relatives, friends, etc. during the holy month is an act of great virtue. It eases the load of the other person, and brings about kindness and affection. Cooperating and assisting one another is greatly loved by Allah.

These and other similar important items are necessary for a successful journey during the month of Ramadhan. Each believer must try to be prepared as possible, lest the opportunity to redeem himself pass away. It is a great loss for the believer if the whole month of mercy and blessings passes, and he has not been able to achieve forgiveness of his sins, and has not won the pleasure of Allah, and the rewards that He gives so abundantly during Ramadhan. To avoid such a failure, it is necessary to keep a Ramadhan checklist that is regularly updated.

A Muslim's Thoughts on Ramadhan

Ramadhan is always a great time for me. In my life, I'm always struggling with the ideal of putting God first in every aspect of my life. I know that God Alone should matter in my life, but in the hectic pace of life, ordinary mundane things start to crowd that feeling out. In Ramdhan, fasting from food, water and other things sets a context within which I can try to establish God's presence in my life. I also know that we are not supposed to only fast from food, drinks etc., but from all hypocrisy, all lies, all dishonesty, all backbiting and all evil. To my surprise, I am able to achieve that to some extent. I can carry that for some months. I think it is like the fourth or fifth month after Ramadhan that it starts to slacken.

It was once said that the true meaning of Fasting is to Fast from anything that distracts you from Remembrance of God. I have loved that ever since I first read it. I think this became a shortcut for me to evaluate every situation before I get involved.

Ramadhan also helps me in my day to day situation in one other way. No matter how bad the situation, I can look past it and say that as Quran says: "life of this world is but an illusion." Once I have done my best, I should give the rest to Him. I know that His Will always work for my highest good, no matter how difficult it may seem at that time. His Will *always* work for our highest good. Every time this faith has been proven true, and as time passes this faith turns and matures into Conviction. Hopefully, this Conviction, this Yaqeen, will translate into the rest of my life and in every month.

I feel very close to other human beings and the rest of creation as well. I am much more forgiving and accepting of my coworkers. I am more liable to overlook their frailties and petty jealousies. I'm like a man who knows that at the end of the day there is a pot of gold that awaits him. Every offering of love we make to Him and His creation, brings us that much closer to Goal. The Goal of The Eternal Bliss, where Allah, the Beloved God will lift the Veil from His Beautiful Face and reveal it to us in all its Splendor, Glory and Beauty. I long for that day. Yes, I do long for that day.

I long for the day that I will earn the privilege of being in company of the Prophets. Then all the worries and problems become petty annoyances. And the mind becomes a little quiet, a little more quiet and a little more quiet, until I hear the quiver of that fragile flame of love and faith in my heart of hearts. It is like when we go to Pilgrimage to Mecca we don our coffins

by symbolizing our deaths from this world and we exclaim at the top of our lungs: I have come my Lord, I have come. If only I could do a minor pilgrimage to Him every day of my life by exclaiming through my life and effort: I have come, my Lord, I have come. I have come to you and I won't go, I have come and don't let me stray. I have come, so make me yours. For verily Allah has promised in His Quran: "Certainly we are His, and to Him shall we return."

I hope this presence of God will persist all through the year until the next Ramadhan comes and I will have no room for anyone but Him and His Lovers and loved ones.

Seeking Nearness to God

The ultimate aim of the journey of a believer is to get close to Allah. To have a position with Him that is special. It is the cherished goal and hope of all those who love Allah. Life in this world is a journey towards that goal. Every action carried out, every deed performed is a step forward in that direction. Human beings have been given life in this world, as an opportunity to achieve the pleasure of Allah, to serve and worship Him and to achieve nearness to Him.

The Holy Qur'an talks about the believers who enjoy a special position with Allah:

> Successful indeed are the believers, who are humble in their prayers, and who keep aloof from what is vain, and who are givers of the poor-rate. . . (23:1-3)

> Those only are believers whose hearts become full of awe when Allah is mentioned, and when His communications are recited to them, they increase them in faith, and in their Lord do they trust. (8:2)

The following Hadithe Qudsi show how close the relationship between Allah the human being can be. Allah says:

> When I find out that a person remembers Me frequently, I will look after his affairs, become his company, speak with him, and become his intimate friend.

> Whenever I know My servant is frequently engaged in remembering Me, I will make him desire to pray and whisper to Me. When My servant becomes such, I will prevent him from any wrongdoing when he decided upon it. Those are My true friends. If I intend to destroy the earth and punish men, I will forego destruction and punishment for their sake.

Why should a believer seek nearness to Allah?

The following are some reasons and benefits of seeking nearness to Allah.

1. Allah is Merciful and loves His Creatures

There is no being who loves the human being more and cares more for his needs than his Creator. Although people sometimes think that God puts a lot of demands on them, and is very strict with them, that He will punish us a soon as they do wrong, this is a great misconception. Allah wants only what is good for human beings.

Allah loves the best of His creations, the human being. One day the Holy Prophet (s) was walking with his companions when he saw a mother bird with her babies in a nest. The mother bird was feeding the small ones some worms. So tender and gentle were her actions, that the companions were awe-struck at this display of love. The Prophet (s) smiled and said, "Are you surprised at the love this mother bird has for her babies? Let me inform you that Allah loves His creatures, the human beings seventy times more than this mother!"

Because He loves the human being, Allah has bestowed upon him many favors. He has given him numerous blessings to enjoy in this world. He has sent rules for his guidance so that the human being will be assured of success in both the worlds. He has promised a great reward for those who obey, and punishment for those who disobey His rules.

In His infinite mercy, Almighty Allah has promised to multiply the reward of good deeds by ten, while the punishment of a sin will only be one. He has ordered the angels to record a good deed as soon as the intention is made, while a sin is recorded only after it is done. A sin can be erased through seeking forgiveness. Allah has encouraged us to ask from Him, to pray to Him, to seek His forgiveness, so that we should be happy. None of this makes a difference to Him, for He is Needless of our prayers and worship. But it makes a big difference to us, to our status with Him, and consequently, our place in the eternal world to come.

When someone loves us, we are naturally drawn to him. We would like to be close to him, and enjoy a loving fulfilling relationship. Knowing that one is loved brings great peace and joy to the human heart. What more could the human being ask for than to be loved by the Power that reigns Supreme in the universe? The One who has control of all things, and the One who invites the human being to Him and offers him love and mercy. Unfortunate is the person who does not recognize the great power of Allah's love, and does not seek nearness to Allah to ease the aches and pains of daily life.

The following hadith tell us about the love and mercy of Allah for the human being:

> Allah is more merciful on you than you are to yourselves. Imam Ali (a)

2. It is the only achievement that will give true peace and happiness

People seek happiness and pleasure for themselves. They try out different ways of achieving that. Some believe it come with wealth, so they spend a lot of time amassing it. Others believe it comes from a good job, or a high position in society. They put in a lot of efforts to secure a

prestigious job. But most people discover that this type of success does not really bring satisfaction to the human heart.

Material wealth and success are poor substitutes for the emptiness in the lives and hearts of people. The modern world is struggling furiously to achieve material success, to have access to all forms of comforts and pleasures for the human being. In this mad race to achieve and amass, human beings have strayed from the path of true happiness. That is why there is an increase in emotional and psychological problems in the world today.

True happiness is derived from faith and love for the God who created us. Almighty Allah says in the Holy Qur'an: Surely by the Remembrance of Allah are hearts set at rest (13:28). A hadith of Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (a) says: Joy and peace lie in the Pleasure of Allah, and in certainty (of belief in Allah). Faith and trust in Allah bring the assurance of a support that will never fade or weaken. With that assurance comes the peace of mind that whatever happens, a human being is never alone. Allah, who loves him, is always with him to help and support him. No material possession or glory can bring that unfailing assurance of support.

3. It will guarantee success in the world and the Hereafter

A successful life is one that has accomplished its purpose of creation. Human beings have been created to know the greatness of the Almighty and worship Him. The human being who seeks nearness to Allah and achieves a degree of it, has fulfilled the purpose behind his creation.

Allah describes true success to be achieved through His pleasure. He says:

> Then give to the near of kin his due, and to the needy and the wayfarer, this is best for those who desire Allah's pleasure, and these it is who are successful. (30:38)

Only Allah can give success in both the worlds. The one who relies totally on him and hopes only from Him, will achieve what he wants in this world as well as the Hereafter.

How to seek Nearness to Allah

In order to attain God's nearness, a believer uses various means. Some of these include:

- Reading and Understanding the Holy Qur'an
- Remembrance of Allah through Supplication and prayer
- Seeking forgiveness

Each of these means has been included as a separate lesson in this manual.

Seeking Nearness in Ramadhan

This type of spiritual journey is undertaken intensively during the month of Ramadhan. Through increased prayers and worship, a believer tries in this month to cover great distances in his lifelong journey towards God. The incentives to earn extra reward and mercy from Allah in this month encourage more good deeds and increased remembrance of Allah. This brings a believer very close to Allah.

Exercises

1. Write an essay on one of the following:

    - The love of Allah for the human being

    - How trust and faith in Allah brings peace to the human heart.

2. What are some signs of those who love Allah? Write down the deeds and actions that occupy their days.

3. Recite the following Dua from Saheefa as-Sajjadiyyah: Dua no. 77, Whispered Prayer of those who love Allah. Name ten qualities of those who love Allah, according to this prayer.

The Spring of the Holy Qur'an

The month of Ramadhan has been aptly named the spring of the Qur'an. During this month, believers set aside more time than usual to understand the word of Allah, to learn and ponder over its verses. Muslim homes and mosques ring with the beautiful recitation of this glorious book. It is the season of Qur'an reciting, when the desire to learn and understand the word of Allah blooms and flourishes, just as the natural world blossoms in the Spring.

The following Ahadith show the importance of reciting the Qur'an in the holy month:

- Invoke your Lord in right earnest, with hearts that are free of sin and evil, to enable you to fast and to recite His Book (the Qur'an).
  Holy Prophet (s)

- Whoever recites an ayat from the Qur'an (in Ramadhan) will receive a similar reward as the one who recites the entire Qur'an in other months.
  Holy Prophet (s)

- Everything has a springtime, and the springtime of the Qur'an is the month of Ramadhan.
  Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a)

- Invoke Allah, ask for forgiveness, recite the Qur'an, and repent to Allah for your sins more frequently, so that the blessings of the month of Ramadhan may come to you, while you are sincere to Allah, the Exalted.
  Imam Ali ar-Ridha (a)

The Holy Qur'an contains great cures for mankind, beautiful gems of wisdom for life, and the best instructions for happiness in this world and the Hereafter. God speaks to human beings through it, and it is incumbent upon all believers to find out for themselves what God has said to them.

Reciting the Holy Qur'an

Many Muslims like to complete the recitation of the entire Qur'an in this blessed month. If

that is not possible, at least a portion of the holy Book should be read during this month. The reward for it is much greater than in other months.

Recitation of the Holy Qur'an has many benefits. The following Hadith illustrate some of these benefits:

- Illuminate your homes by reciting the Holy Qur'an . . for if the Holy Qur'an is recited frequently in a house, it brings blessings for the family, and the house will give light to those in Heaven as the stars of Heaven give light to those on the earth.
  Holy Prophet (s)

- The heart gathers rust like iron. Remove this rust by the recitation of the Qur'an.
  Holy Prophet (s)

- Whoever derives pleasure from the recitation of Qur'an, will not be depressed by the departure of friends.
  Imam Ali (a)

How to recite the Qur'an

1. Do wudhu before reciting. It is forbidden to touch the writings of Qur'an without wudhu. Even when not touching the writings, it is recommended to do wudhu before reciting the Qur'an.

2. See protection of Allah from the Shaytan.

3. Recite with a beautiful voice. The Holy Qur'an should be read slowly, with a beautiful voice and consideration for the rules of recitation. The Holy Prophet (s) says: Give beauty to the Qur'an with your voices. And when he was asked as to who had the best voice for recitation, he said: The person who, when you listen to him, you realize that he fears Allah. The Holy Prophet (s) has also said: Everything has a decoration, and the decoration for the Qur'an is a beautiful voice.

4. Interact with the Qur'an. Another important point to remember is to interact with the Qur'an when reciting it. When reading verses which promise blessings and reward for the believers, one should be excited and hopeful. But on reading descriptions of punishments meted out to those who disbelieved and displeased Allah, a believer is fearful and seeks refuge in Allah. Sometimes Allah asks a questions, as in Sura ar-Rahman, Which of the bounties of your Lord will you two deny?. Commentators say a recitor of the Qur'an should answer that by saying None of your bounties, my Lord, do I deny. This type of interacting with the Qur'an makes the Qur'an alive, not just a book to be read.

Understanding the Holy Qur'an

It is important that believers try to understand what Allah has revealed in the Holy Qur'an. It is a book of guidance, and to derive and act upon this guidance, we need to read and understand its verses. The fourth Imam (a) says:

- The Qur'anic verses are treasures of Knowledge and whenever a treasure is opened, you have to see what lies therein.

- Ponder over the verses of the Qur'an, and learn from them, for they are the best of lessons.

Understanding the Qur'an could be done through reading the translation, thinking about the words used in the verse, the causes of revelation, and reading and discussing the commentary provided by knowledgeable scholars.

Understanding and pondering over the verses of the Holy Qur'an is an important duty of all Muslims. Allah talks to us through the Qur'an, and we need to read and understand what He says in it. Many Muslims believe that understanding the Qur'an is the duty of scholars, and they are content to just recite the verses without giving them much thought. The Holy Prophet (s) will complain about such Muslims on the day of Judgement. The Qur'an says he will say: O my Lord! My people took the Qur'an very lightly. By studying and pondering over the verses of the Qur'an, we will not be among the group the Prophet (s) will complain about on the day of Judgement.

Exercises

These exercises are to familiarize students with the contents of the Qur'an. This will Inshallah bring an appreciation for the holy Book, and an increased understanding of what God has sent us for guidance.

1. Choose one surah of the holy Qur'an for students to memorize, understand, ponder over, and read commentary of. Surahs could be chosen according to Grade level and available material. Some good sources of commentary for surahs are:

2. Choose some Qur'anic verses on important topics for students to learn. They could memorize them, understand them, ponder over them, and read or discuss relevant commentary. Some verses which could be included are:

3. Let students make their own schedules for Quranic recital during the holy month. This could include reading of translation and/or commentary.

4. Let the students memorize the hadith on importance of reciting and understanding the Qur'an.

5. Discuss the following important topics with the students during the holy month:

    - Revelation and compilation of the Qur'an
    - Miracles of the Qur'an
    - The need of guidance for human beings

Supplicating to the Almighty

The holy month of Ramadhan is a special time for supplicating to Allah. Dua, or supplication, is especially encouraged. Believers spend a lot of time in this month praying to the Almighty, asking for their needs of this world and the Hereafter. Apart from the recommended duas for the nights and days of this blessed month, we are told to be in a constant state of prayer and dua.

The following Ahadith show the importance of Dua in the month of Ramadhan:

- Supplicate (in Ramadhan) with your hands raised at the times of prayer, as these are the best of times during which the Almighty looks at His servants with mercy. (He) answers if they supplicate, responds if they call, grants if they ask, and accepts if they entreat. Holy Prophet (s)

- Pray and seek forgiveness more frequently in the month of Ramadhan. Prayer wards off misfortune, and forgiveness cleanses your sins. Imam Ali (a)

What is Du`a?

Dua is a simple acceptance of the difference between the existences of God and the human being.

-The existence of Allah as the source of all good, perfection, independence and bestowal.
-The existence of the human being as a vessel of poverty, need, dependant on constant bestowal and favor.

Thus the human being needs to ask for and receive the favors of the Almighty. He is in constant need for what only Allah can give Him. To help him achieve his dreams, to give him success and happiness in this world and the Hereafter, he needs the favors of Allah.

The Almighty God, in His mercy and love for the human being, has allowed believers to ask from Him, and has promised to answer them. This is a great favor of God. The following Qur'anic verses show how Allah invites believers to ask from Him:

- And when my servants ask you concerning Me, then surely I am very near; I answer the supplicant when he calls upon Me, so they should answer My call and believe in Me, that they may walk the right way. (2:186)

- Call unto Me, I will answer you. Those who are too proud to worship Me will enter Hell. (40:60)

- Call your Lord humbly and secretly, He loves not the transgressors. (7:55)

- And call on Him, fearing and hoping, surely the mercy of Allah is near to those who do good. (7:56)

Many Hadith also emphasize the importance of supplicating to Allah:

- Du`a is the weapon of the believer, and the pillar of faith, and the light of the heavens and the earth. Holy Prophet (s)

- Know that He who owns the treasures of the skies and the earth has permitted you to pray to Him, and has promised you acceptance of the prayer. He has commanded you to beg of Him in order that He may give you, and to seek His mercy in order that He may have mercy on you.

  He has opened for you the door of repentance. Therefore whenever you call Him, He hears your call, and whenever you whisper to Him, He knows the whisper. You place before him your needs, unveil before Him yourself, complain to Him for your worries, beseech Him to remove your troubles, seek His help in your affairs, and ask from the treasures of His mercy what no-one else has the power to give, namely long life, health of body, and increase of livelihood. Imam Ali (a) Letter 31, Nahjul Balagha

Allah loves the believers who ask from Him, and supplicate constantly. The Holy Prophet (s) has said that on the Day of Judgement, two men with very similar deeds will enter Heaven. One of them will see that the other is granted a rank above him. He will ask Allah: "My Lord! We have the same actions. Why have you preferred him over me"? Allah will reply, "He asked from Me, and you did not".

Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (a) often encouraged his companions to ask from Allah. He once said to Maysar, his companion : O Maysar! Supplicate, and do not say the affair has been destined. Surely there are ranks with Allah which cannot be reached except through asking. If the servant (of Allah) closes his mouth and does not ask, he will not be given anything, so ask and you will get. O Maysar, the door that is knocked often is most likely to open.

Dua is a great tool given to believers by Allah. Using du`a they can achieve great things and

overcome many problems. One who has been given the power of Dua can never lose hope, as in his hands lies a great weapon. It is man's own loss if he does not make use of the tremendous potential of Du`a.

Effects of Dua

1. **Pleases the Almighty**

   Allah loves that believers should pray to Him constantly. He says in the Holy Qur'an: Allah would not care for you were it not for your supplications. (25:77).Ahadith also tell us of how Allah loves those who pray and ask from Him:

   - God loves nothing better than that His servants ask from Him. Imam al-Baqir (a)

   - Supplicate, for there is nothing like Dua to get you closer to Allah, and do not leave out your minor needs, for the One who is the Master of the major needs is also the Master of the minor ones. Imam as-Sadiq (a)

2. **Gives Peace and Contentment**

   A person who prays to Allah, putting all faith and trust in Him, never feels alone or lonely. He has harnessed his own insignificant power onto a being who is the Supreme Power, and who has promised to answer His call. This gives him great peace of mind. It makes him confident that with the help of Allah, all things can be done. He knows also that whatever happens to him is the decree of the Wise, the almighty. Says the Holy Qur'an: Those who believe and whose hearts are set at rest by the remembrance of Allah, surely by Allah's remembrance are hearts set at rest. (13:28)

3. **Increases Knowledge and Humility**

   Most duas teach us about the greatness of Allah, and His qualities. They also make us aware of our lowly position and our helplessness. That is why Allah says: Call unto Me, I will answer you. Those who are too proud to worship Me will enter Hell. (40:60) Those who do not ask from Allah are described as the proud ones. Believers are encouraged to pray all the time, and for all things - even those which seem minor. Allah once told Nabi Musa (a), O Musa! Ask Me for everything, even the mending of your shoelace. When a human being realizes that he is in constant need of the favors of Allah, this will prevent him from becoming proud and arrogant. It reminds him of his own neediness and poverty.

4. **Changes what is destined**

Du`a reverts what has been destined. Although Allah decrees all things, He has given us the ability to make changes through Dua. The Holy Prophet (s) has said: What is destined cannot be averted except through Dua. Another Hadith says: Indeed caution cannot save you from what is destined, but what can save you from it is Dua. Imam `Ali(a)

5. **Averts Difficulties**

   Many problems and difficulties in life can be avoided by praying to Allah. He is in complete control, and can keep away all afflictions from those who ask Him for that. The following Ahadith explain the importance of Dua for avoiding difficulties: Whoever fears difficulties should supplicate, Allah will never let the difficulties come to him. Imam as-Sadiq (a) Surely Dua meets the difficulties, and the two join together until the Day of Judgement. Imam al-Kadhim (a)

Etiquette of Du`a

As we spend more and more time reciting Duas during the holy months of Rajab, Sha`baan, and Ramadhan, it is necessary to know the correct etiquette of Dua. Supplicating to the Almighty should be done in the appropriate manner - in the manner that Allah loves - in order to benefit fully from it. The following are some of the Etiquette of Dua according to Hadith.

Begin with Bismillah: A Hadith of the Holy Prophet (s) says: No dua which has Basmalah (saying of Bismillahir Rahmaneer Raheem) at the beginning of it is rejected. A dua should begin in the name of Allah, putting all trust and hope in Him alone. Describing Him as Kind and Merciful creates confidence that the dua will not be rejected.

Send Blessings on Muhammad and his family: A Hadith of the 6th Imam (a) says: Whoever has a wish he wants Allah to fulfill, let him begin with blessings on Muhammad and his family, then let him ask his wish, and end by sending blessings on Muhammad and his family. Allah is nobler than to accept the first and the last (the blessings) and reject the middle. Salawat is a dua for the Holy Prophet (s) and his family. Whoever includes that dua is assured of the acceptance of his dua for himself.

Praise and Glorify Allah: Every Dua should begin with the praise of Allah, the recognition that He alone has the Power and Might over everything. A supplicant increases in his humility as he acknowledges the greatness of the Almighty. He realizes that everything is in the control of God, and if He wishes, the dua can be accepted and answered immediately.

Acknowledgement of Sins: When supplicating to Allah, one should be aware of and confess that one is a sinner, undeserving of the favor of Allah. Humility and apprehensiveness are

commendable qualities in the one who supplicates.

Pray emotionally: Allah says in Hadithe Qudsi to Nabi Isa (a): O Isa! When you ask from me, supplicate to me the supplication of the grief stricken, the overwhelmed, the one who has no helper . . . and do not supplicate to Me except in an emotional state. Your grief should be only one. Whenever you pray to Me in such a way, I shall answer you. A soft heart and tears are the best weapons of a human being in his quest to achieve nearness to Allah. When one prays emotionally, the Dua is very sincere and acceptance is assured.

Pray for others: Whoever prays for others pleases the Almighty greatly. A Hadith of Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a) says: Nothing is more swiftly answered than a Dua recited for others. According to the Holy Prophet(s), the Dua of a believer for other believers is returned to him as many times as the number of believing men and women from the beginning of creation to the Day of Judgement.

Have confidence that Allah will answer your prayers : When praying, the supplicant must have trust that Allah will answer his prayers. A Hadith says, Whenever you recite Dua, assume that what you need is at the door.

Du`a is always answered

Whoever asks something from Allah, his du`a is always heard and answered. Sometimes it is not answered in the way the supplicant expects. No du`a is rejected. Allah is more noble than to tell His servants to ask from Him, and then reject their du`a. Many Ahadith tell us of how Allah always answers the supplicant, and is pleased with Him. A believer who prays and asks from Allah, is guaranteed one of three things:

- Either his du`a is answered immediately
- Or he is given a reward for it for the Hereafter
- Or a difficulty is averted from him

During the month of Ramadhan, believers try and spend as much time in du`a as possible. This is the month in which du`a carries even greater reward than usual, a month in which the mercy of Allah guarantees immediate acceptance of du`a.

Exercises

The following are some examples of what children could do as they study the importance of dua. Teachers can choose to study a specific dua, encourage students to compose poems, write essays, or even write a play on the effectiveness of dua on daily life.

1. Write a story of someone who was in a great difficulty. Show how faith in Allah and dua helped the person. Explain the change in emotional and mental state after supplicating to Allah, and entrusting Him with the problem.

2. List ten things you usually do each day for which you could ask help from Allah. Remember that dua is not only for major problems. Even simple everyday tasks could be improved greatly with the help and support of the almighty.

3. Read the section from Nahjul Balagha where Imam Ali (a) advises his son about Du`a in Letter 31. Write in your own words how you would use that section of the letter to advise one of your friends.

4. Choose one of the whispered duas (Munajaat) from Saheefa as-Sajjadiyyah to read and ponder over. What does Imam say which makes his duas very effective? What do you understand about the relationship Imam has with Allah.?

Seeking Forgiveness from Allah

The holy month of Ramadhan is an excellent opportunity to have one's sins forgiven. Allah's blessings and mercy are so abundant in this month that anybody who truly repents in it, becomes as free of sins at the end of the month as when he was born. It is a glorious chance offered to us by the Almighty, a chance to cleanse and purify ourselves from the filth of sins and evil. The Holy Prophet has advised believers: O people . . . your back is breaking under the heavy load of your sins, so prostrate yourself before Him (in Ramadhan) for long intervals, and make it lighter.

It is a proof of the love of the Almighty that each year he gives us a chance to clean our record and make a fresh start. Contrary to those who think that Allah is strict and harsh, that He will punish us as soon as we err, Allah gives us many chances to undo the wrong we have done towards Him. The month of Ramadhan is the best of these chances. All the duas for this month teach us to plead for forgiveness and deliverance from the punishment. One who recites these duas sincerely, and is truly repentant, is assured of forgiveness.

The Holy Qur'an says about seeking forgiveness:

- And hasten to forgiveness from your Lord, and a Garden the extensiveness of which is the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who guard against evil. (3:132)
- And whoever does evil, and oppresses his soul, then seeks forgiveness of Allah, he will find Allah to be Forgiving, Merciful. (4:110)
- Will they not turn to Allah and seek His forgiveness, and Allah is oft-forgiving, Merciful. (5:74)

The following Hadith talk beautifully and eloquently on Istighfar (seeking forgiveness):

- Fortunate is the person who finds in his record of deeds a lot of seeking forgiveness. Holy Prophet (s)
- The similitude of Istighfar is like the leaves on a tree. The tree is shaken, and the leaves fall off. Imam Ridha (a)

- Fragrance yourselves with Istighfar so the stench of sins does not disturb you. Imam Ali (a)

- Seek forgiveness abundantly, for Allah has not taught you how to seek forgiveness except because He wishes to forgive you. Holy Prophet (s)

Necessity of Istighfar in the life of a believer

When Allah created the human being, He gave him the faculty of good and evil. The human is free to choose his actions. He can decide to do a good deed, and stay on the right path. Or he can decide to do an evil deed and disobey his Lord. He has two sides to him; the intelligence and conscience that guide him towards good, and the evil soul that invites him to do wrong. The status of the human being with Allah depends on the type of actions he chooses to commit. The record of deeds he commits in this world will determine his end, whether in Heaven having earned the pleasure of Allah, or in Hell, deserving of the wrath and displeasure of Allah.

What happens when a human being sometimes chooses wrong, submits to his evil soul and ignores the dictates of his conscience? Is he doomed to forever carry the burden of that sin? Knowing that human beings were prone to slip, Allah in His immense mercy and wisdom, has opened the door of Istighfar for His servants, the door of seeking forgiveness after a sin. So whoever commits a sin, but repents and wishes he had not committed it, and knows that he will not do it again - at least will try never to repeat it again - can enter that door, and have the sins erased from his record.

Istighfar is the weapon of believers against the Shaytan who tries to lead them into Hell through inviting them to sin. According to a hadith of the Holy Prophet (s), Iblees declared to Allah that he would continuously try to lead humans astray so long as they were alive. Allah answered that He would continuously forgive them so long as they sought His forgiveness.

The best time to seek forgiveness is during the early hours of the morning before dawn. That is a very special time, when all duas are accepted. The Holy Qur'an describes the believers as those who seek forgiveness at the time of dawn.

The holy month of Ramadhan is a time when there is a general amnesty for sinners. Allah invites the sinners to come and seek His forgiveness. This is an opportunity that must not be missed, for no-one knows if he/she will be alive for the next year. When a criminal is told that the government is issuing pardons for those who seek it, to commemorate a happy event, he will jump at the chance to avoid punishment. He can save himself years in jail, a lot of misery and torture, by seeking pardon. It is a golden opportunity which no sensible person would miss. Similar is the case of the sinner who has disobeyed his Lord. He is a criminal, and when

Allah offers a special pardon, the sinner seizes the chance. He would like to erase his sins and relieve himself of the burden of disobedience.

Conditions of Istighfar

It is important to note that to seek forgiveness, and then continue committing the same sin, is a sin in itself. It is wrong to mock and deceive oneself into thinking that one can seek forgiveness without having a firm intention to quit sins. That kind of Istighfar is a mockery, and will earn the displeasure of Allah. The following Ahadith clearly illustrate the evils of that type of attitude:

1. Seeking forgiveness but continuing to sin, is a new sin. Imam Ali (a)

2. One who seeks forgiveness for a sin, and does it, has mocked his Lord. Imam Ali ar-Ridha (a)

3. The best way of seeking forgiveness is through regret and avoidance (of sins) Holy Prophet (s)

Once Imam Ali (a) heard someone saying: Astaghfirullah. Imam told him: Do you know what Istighfar is. Istighfar is meant for people of high positions. It is a word that stands on six meanings:

1. To repent over the past.

2. To make a firm determination never to repeat it.

3. To discharge all the rights of people so that you may meet Allah quite clean with nothing to account for.

4. To fulfil every obligatory act which you ignored (in the past) so that you may now do justice with it.

5. To aim at the flesh grown as a result of unlawful earnings, so that it may melt by grief (of repentance) till the skin touches the bone and a new flesh grows between them.

6. To make the body taste the pain of obedience as you previously made it taste the sweetness of disobedience.

On such occasions you may say Astaghfirullah.

Exercises

1. Let the students familiarize themselves with the Arabic words: Ghafar, al-Ghafur, Istighfar. Write the Arabic as well as the English equivalent. Older children could write and memorize some of the relevant verses and hadith on Istighfar.

2. Choose a hadith to work on. The hadith could be displayed with illustration on a board, written in calligraphy, use cut out letters, felt etc. to make a decorative hadith.

3. Write an essay on one of the following:

    - Shaytan's reaction upon finding out that Istighfar is allowed and encouraged for believers.

    - The difference between our record of deeds with Istighfar, and without Istighfar.

    - The story of a person's regret on the Day of Judgement when he sees his record devoid of Istighfar while the records of others shine brightly because of Istighfar.

    - How seeking forgiveness constantly helps us stay away from sins and be closer to the Almighty.

Eighteen reasons why a Muslim Fasts

Every year the month of Ramadhan comes and goes; every year we fast, yet without proper appreciation of the potentials of character building that the fasts hold for us. We find ourselves as spiritually backwards after the fast are over as when the month began. In fact our lack of knowledge of the real objectives of fasts often tends to produce an adverse effect in us, for, as is well known, the best of medicines could have ill effects if not taken in accordance with the physician's directives and instructions.

Thus it is, that the fast tends to make many of us irritable and quick tempered (expecting, as we do, VIP treatment from others, especially our subordinates and family members because of our fast) while the fast was in fact meant to mellow us into exhibiting the finer tracts of human character as illustrated by our Imams.

Imam Zaynul Abidin (a) would record the lapses of his servants during the month of Ramadhan, without telling them anything at the time. As the month would draw to its close, he would gather the servants before him and apprise them of their mistakes, for giving them at the same time and beseeching the Lord to forgive him, even as he had forgiven them. The holy Imam, Masoom that he was, only sought by this practical demonstration to draw attention of his followers to the fact that they would be accountable to God for their actions and should they desire His forgiveness, they would have to forgive their subordinates as well. This practical lesson taught by the Imam ought to be rigorously pursued during the month of Ramadhan by the followers of the Imam.

As in this case, so in other spheres of life, our attitude to fasts ought indeed to be radically changed. We ought to welcome fasts as a practical means of reforming ourselves rather than nearly consider them as an inevitable religious bondage, eagerly awaiting to free ourselves there from at the month end to resume our ways of old again.

Besides of course being a means to acquiring the pleasure of God, for which all acts of devotion are basically meant, fasting could be used as a stepping stone to build up the various traits of character in accordance with the clear injunctions of the Qur'an itself that fasts have been prescribed with a view to developing piety in man.

In the hurry and bustle of the present day life, man often finds himself ill-equipped to battle

through life's odds if he is not equipped with the proper attitude to face the various problems. While we find ourselves frustrated or look to other directions in such difficulties, we have most unfortunately overlooked the character building force that the fasts provide us every year.

Ramadhan is a month of fasting and prayers for the Muslims. The fast consists of total abstinence from food and drink from dawn to dusk. There is however, a greater significance to fasts than mere abstinence from eating and drinking. The real objective of fasts is to inculcate in man the spirit of abstinence from sins, and cultivation of virtue. Thus the Qur'an declares that the fasts have been prescribed with a view to developing piety in man. How are the many facets of piety sought to be cultivated through fasts? This article tries to list as concisely as possible, the various benefits the fasts would confer upon Muslims.

1. The most important consideration in undertaking a fast, as in any act of devotion, is to seek nearness to God, and seek His pleasure and Forgiveness. This itself generates a spirit of piety in man.

2. Creating the conditions of hunger and thirst for oneself, simply in obedience to the Divine order, measures the faith of man in God and helps strengthen it by putting it to a severe test.

3. Fasting enhances through creation of artificial non-availability, the value of the bounties of God which man often takes for granted. This inculcates in man a spirit of gratitude and consequent devotion to God. Nothing else can bring home to a man the worth of God's bounties than a glass of water and a square meal after a day long fast. This also reminds man that the real joy in enjoying God's bounties lies in moderation and restraint and not in over indulging.

4. Fasting makes us deeply conscious of the pangs of hunger and discomfort suffered by the less fortunate among our brethren. They have to put up with difficult conditions all through their lives. It thus kindles in man a spirit of sacrifice leading to change towards his suffering brethren.

5. Fasting gives man an unfailing training in endurance, a spirit of acceptance. This could well prepare him to put up with the unchangeable situations in life in the same spirit of resignation as cultivated during the fasts.

6. Fasting develops courage, fortitude, and a fighting spirit in man to surmount the heavy odds in life with a cool and tranquil mind. It sharpens his power of concentration to overcome obstacles through a vigorous exercise all throughout the month, leading to a steeling of his will power and resolve, that could help him in challenging situations in life. It is seen than many an undesirable habit which is difficult to give up, is more

easily given up during the days of fasting.

7. Fasting teaches man reliance on God, and confidence in Him. Just as the vigorous state of fasting for a whole month is undertaken with His assistance, bitter situations in life could also be surmounted with His help.

8. Fasting develops a spirit of patience in man, with the realization that the days of fasting, though seemingly unending, do have a successful and happy end. Thus is life. All bitter situations pass, and come to an end.

9. Fasting is meant to conquer anger and develop self-control in man. The vigorous effort required to put up with hunger and thirst can well be extended to conquer other infirmities of human character that lead man into error and sin.

10. Fasting inculcates a spirit of tolerance in man to face unpleasant conditions and situations without making his fellow beings the victim of his wrath. Many people, when facing discomfort and deprivation, become irritable and annoyed. This anger is then vented on those around them. Fasting helps a man become more tolerant despite his own discomfort.

11. Fasting mellows a man and enhances his character, giving a jolt to the human instincts of pride, haughtiness, jealousy and ambition. Fasting softens his character, and clears his heart and mind of many negative emotions.

12. Fasting exposes the weakness of man in the event of his being deprived of two basic bounties of God; food and drink. It infuses into him a spirit of weakness and submission, generating humility and prayer in an otherwise arrogant being.

13. Fasting breathes the spirit of forgiveness in man towards others, as he seeks God's forgiveness through fasts and prayers.

14. Fasting gives lessons in punctuality. Man has to adhere to a strict schedule of time in the observance of the fast.

15. Fasting could affect the economy of the individual as he is less wasteful on food and meals.

16. Fasting demands a rigid sense of discipline, mental, spiritual and physical. This forms characteristics which are an essential ingredient to success in life.

17. Fasting creates spiritual reformation in man, infusing him with a spirit of enthusiasm and zest to change and become a better human being in the eyes of God. This is an

excellent opportunity, given to believers each year, to change themselves and consequently their destinities.

18. On the physical side, fasting cleanses the human system of the accumulated impurities of uninterrupted eating throughout the year. It prepares the body to face diseases or conditions of scarcity. The rigid abstinence of a fast regulates man's health, sharpens his intellect and enhances the qualities of his heart.

Fasting is thus a bounty in itself, encompassing within itself many bounties. It instills a spirit of reformation in man, creating a wide awakening in him to fulfil his duties towards God and man, and towards himself.

(Adapted from an article by Marhum Ahmed Sheriff Dewji, published in the Light Magazine)

Sympathy for Others

The month of Ramadhan teaches us how it feels to be poor and hungry. Many Ahadith expound the philosophy of fasting as a blessing from the Almighty so that one becomes aware of the hardships of the poor and the needy. A fasting person acquires the virtues of empathy for others, feels for them when they go through hunger and deprivation as he has also tasted the pain of it through fasting. It is easy for those who have abundant supplies of everything they need, to overlook and underestimate the pains of the less fortunate. The pangs of hunger felt by the fasting person are a reminder.

Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq(a) says:

> Allah made fasting incumbent to make equity between the rich and the poor. A rich man does not feel the pains of hunger to have mercy for the poor since he is able to obtain whatever he likes. (By enjoining fasting) Allah wanted to put His creatures on an equal footing by making the rich taste the pain of hunger, so that he may pity and have mercy on the hungry ..

Conditions of the Poor and Needy around the world

Many people around the world live in dire poverty, with very little means to overcome the misery they live in. Young children are forced to live under extremely miserable conditions. They have to struggle daily to get food, many have no homes or shelters, and some have to join the work force to earn for their families. For such children, childhood as a period of carefree days filled with play and laughter is non-existent. Toys, delicious food, new clothes and all the other luxuries taken for granted by many of us, are all unattainable dreams.

Helping Others

It is the duty of those who are fortunate in terms of material wealth, to help the less fortunate in different parts of the world. This can be done by sending aid to various charitable organizations that look after the needs of the poor in countries like India, Iraq and others.

There are many Qur'anic verses that call for spending money in the cause of God:

> The parable of those who spend their wealth in the Way of God is that of a grain of corn. It grows seven ears, and each ear hath a hundred grains. God gives manifold increase to whom He pleases. God cares for all, and He knows all things. For those who spend their wealth in the Cause of God, and follow not up their gifts with reminders or with injury, their reward is with their Lord; on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve. (2:261-262).

God explains that the money we spend in His Cause will be doubled and multiplied for us, and that this will be profitable for us both now and in the Hereafter. The only condition, however, that God sets for the attainment of this reward, is that the benefactor should not remind those who receive his support of his benefaction to them.

The Qur'an urges people to acts of charity and makes it attractive to believers by describing charity as a goodly loan. He says:. Who is he that will lend God a goodly loan, which God will double unto his credit and multiply many times? It is God that gives (you) Want or Plenty, and to Him shall be your return (2: 245).

God shows extreme kindness by making charity a sort of goodly loan paid to Him. It is the needy who ask for loans, whereas God, to Whom "belongs the dominion of heavens and the earth, and all in between", is not in need of a loan from His creatures. But the mode of expression is set in this form mainly to attract believrs into giving charity, thereby securing a means for the poor to achieve what they need, and for the more fortunate to achieve the pleasure of Allah. The benefit of this loan goes back to human beings themselves, and they enjoy the fruits of it in this world as well as in the Hereafter. Such is the mercy of Allah.

The Qur'an also describes the spending of money in the Cause of God as a profitable trade that benefits its owner on the Day of Resurrection:

> O you who believe! Shall I lead you to commerce that saves you from a grievous Penalty? You should believe in God and His Apostle, and should strive (your utmost) in the cause of God, with your property and your lives. That will be best for you, if you but knew (61: 10-11).

Many Ahadith also talk about the benefit of helping others:

- Charity keeps away from its givers, the heat of the grave, and on the Day of Judgement, the believer will be in the shade of his charity. Holy Prophet (s)

- Allah smiles at the person who stretches out his hand to give charity, and whoever Allah smiles at is forgiven. Holy Prophet (s)

- Guard yourselves from the fire (through charity) even if by a date, for surely Allah will

> raise it (cause it to grow), just as one of you raises his foal . . . until it becomes greater than a huge mountain. Holy Propeht (s)

An important point to remember is that the wealth which human beings enjoy actually belongs to Allah. The Qur'an continuously brings men's attention to the fact that wealth is only God's, and that man is no more than a proxy of God in supervising it; consequently, man should not disobey God regarding the trust put under his charge. Allah is the Owner of heavens and the earth: To God belongs the dominion of heavens and the earth (3: 189). And it is God Who provides sustenance to all people: Is there a Creator, other than God, to give you sustenance from heaven or earth? (35: 3).

People are requested to spend of the wealth that God has bestowed upon them, on those who do not have it. The fact is that wealth is not theirs, for they act only as representatives who have been assigned by God to manage it: Spend (in charity) out of the (wealth) whereof He hath made you heirs" (57: 7). And spend something (in charity) out of the wealth which We have bestowed on you, before Death should come to any of you and he should say, 'O my Lord! Why did You not give me respite for a little while? I should then have given (largely) in charity, and I should have been one of the righteous (63:10).

Being Grateful to the Almighty

Just as fasting teaches us to sympathize with the poor and the needy, it also teaches us to be grateful for all the blessings of the Almighty we enjoy. The food and wholesome drinks so abundantly available are great blessings of God. Because we have them everyday, we do not realize their importance. But when we are forced to restrain ourselves while fasting, we understand the importance of having enough to eat and satisfy the pangs of hunger.

The Holy Qur'an says:

> And whoever is grateful, he is grateful for his own soul, and whoever is ungrateful, then surely My Lord is Self-sufficient, Honored. (27:40)
>
> Nay! But serve Allah alone, and be among the thankful ones. (39:66)

The following Ahadith also talk about the importance of being grateful:

- The first of your obligations to Allah is to thank His favors, and seek His pleasure. Imam Ali (a)

- Every breath you take requires thanks, in fact a thousand thanks, and more. Imam Ja`far as-Sadiq (a)

- No-one knows a favor except the one who thanks, and no-one thanks a favor except the one who knows. Imam Hasan al-Askari (a)

Exercises

1. Choose a country that has recently undergone a tragedy (war, earthquake, hurricane etc.). What happened to the people there? Imagine you were living there. Write a short essay on how you would feel if you had to go through the misery there.

2. Read the following paragraph from the book Risalatul Huqooq by Imam Zaynul Abidin (a): The right of charity is that you know that it is a storing way with your Lord, and a deposit for which you will have no need of witnesses. If you deposit it in secret, you will be more confident of it than if you deposit it in public. You should know that it repels affliction and illnesses from you in this world and it will repel the fire from you in the next world. Explain this in your own words. According to this paragraph, what is the best way of giving charity? What three benefits of charity does Imam mention? Now write down the points Imam makes in this paragraph.

3. Read the translation of Dua no. 44 from Saheefa as-Sajjadiyyah. What does Imam say about charity in the month of Ramadhan.

Ramadhan

Lo! Here once again is the blessed month of Ramadhan
Once again some of us find it difficult to fast
Once again we are fortunate to hear the Adhaan
Once again we could try and do better than last

O Companions, this month comes but once a year
Wake up my friends let us make it ever dear
Fasting is good for health, it chastens the mind
Beware Muslims! This glamorous world is making you blind

Remember the Holy Qur'an! Our book of guidance
The blessed Prophet received it this month, yes
It contains Laws, thoughts that make it ever radiant
Lo! It emphasizes fasts and prayers to keep us out of mess

O you who believe! Are we to neglect the words of Almighty Allah?
No, no, it should not be, come on Muslims, let us face the Kaaba
Forget the pie, forget the drinks, let them lay
Fasting is but a few hours a day

O ye faithful! Leave aside smoking, vices
This is Ramadhan, clean your hearts of vanities
Fast, pray, remember Allah and recite the Holy Book
Allah is Merciful, yes, He can give us all a new look.

Eid

Eid Mubarak, O you who fasted
Edi Mubarak, brothers and sisters in Islam
Today is Eid, a day of good deeds
Today is Eid, indeed a time for treats

Today my friends, do your duty, pay your Fitr dues
Help the unfortunate, they'll find any of much use
Help the needy, give the zakat, collect the blessings
Allah is Supreme, He'll make your life ever befitting

Forget not the prayers, the Holy Qur'an, their value is astounding
Be ready on the call of Adhaan
Pray for yourself, pray for others, pray for good all the time
Say the prayers, recite the Qur'an, make your life sublime

Come on, Muslims, let us all converge on one ground
Let us all say the prayers together, with one command
Shoulder to shoulder we'll stand, together we'll bow
Allahu Akber, let the cry be heard all over now

Eid Mubarak, believers in One, Allah Almighty
Be joyous today, forget that anxiety
Cheer the sad, shake a hundred hands
Strengthen the weak, towards children be kind

Eid Mubarak, success be yours this day
All that you wish yourself I pray
May you shine, May you follow Allah's way
Happy Eid, may Islam advance this day

Thoughts on Eid

Thoughts on Eid

Many people wonder why we celebrate Eid at the end of Ramadhan. Are we happy that Ramadhan has finished? How can we be happy that such a great month of Allah, with all its blessings and mercies, has gone away? The actual reason we celebrate Eid is not because we are glad the holy month is over, but because we are thankful to Allah for giving us the chance and the strength to carry out His commands in the blessed month. We are happy that we were able to fast and pray in Ramadhan, and have hopefully attained Taqwa, the goal of fasting.

In the holy Qur'an Allah talks about Eid. He says in Sura al-Baqarah, ayat no.185:

> You shall complete the number (of days) and you may glorify God for His guiding you, and that you may be thankful.

Imam Ali (a) has a very beautiful hadith about Eid in which he says: Eid is for him whose fasts have been accepted by Allah, and whose worship has been appreciated by Allah. Everyday in which you do not disobey Allah is a day of Eid. This hadith is something to think about. Every day in which we do not commit a single sin, is actually a day of Eid for us.

The Holy Prophet (s) and our Imams celebrated Eid and encouraged all Muslims to do so. They told Muslims to wear good clothes, put on perfume, and go to the mosque to recite the Eid prayer. They also said we should exchange Eid greetings, visit each other, and generally pass the day joyfully. We are supposed to remember the poor by taking out the fitrah before Eid, and visiting them and sending them gifts if we can.

The day of Eid is meant for remembering Allah. The Holy Prophet (s) says: "Give beauty to your Eid by doing Takbir". It is said that the Prophet (s) himself used to come out of his home on the day of Eid, reciitng the Takbir and glorifying Allah in a loud voice.

Let me narrate to you a beautiful story about a day of Eid during the time of our eighth Imam, Imam Ali ar-Ridha (a). Mamoon who was the Khalifa at that time, had appointed the Imam as his successor. When the day of Eid approached, mamoon sent a message to request the Imam to lead the Eid prayer. Imam refused at first, but when Mamoon insisted he said he would lead

the prayer in the same way as his grandfather the Holy Prophet (s) did. Mamoon agreed.

On the morning of Eid, Imam took a bath and changed his clothes. He put on a white turban and applied perfume. He came out of his home barefooted. He took a few steps, turned his face towrads the sky, and said the takbir; Allahu Akber, Allahu Akber. The people of the city had flocked to see the Imam come to lead the Eid prayer. They responded loudly to the Takbir of the Imam. Allahu Akber, they said. The effect was magnetic. People began to throw off their shoes to become bare-footed like the Imam, and they all followed him to the Mosque, reciting the Takbir as they went. When Mamoon heard of the effect Imam was having on the people, he was scared. He quickly sent a message to the Imam that Imam should return to his home, and that he himself was coming to lead the Eid prayer.

Celebrating Eid unites Muslims. As a community, they get closer to work together to make it a memorable occasion. Eid prayers, and other programs held to celebrate it allow Muslims to meet and enjoy the company of one another.